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2013-08-01

DRMI Course Empowers International Leaders With Defense Management Strategies

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/44773>



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NPS > About NPS >
News

Article By: Kenneth A. Stewart

The Naval Postgraduate School's (NPS) Defense Resources Management Institute (DRMI) wrapped up its latest Senior International Defense Management Course (SIDMC) July 19, providing 35 high-ranking military and civilian leaders from 24 nations with an extensive educational experience in managing a department of defense.

The SIDMC is DRMI's flagship course ... Participants include internationally-renowned leaders and academics with wide-ranging expertise in their respective fields. Notable SIDMC graduates include Jordan's King Abdullah and the sitting presidents of both Albania and Lebanon.



Participants in the 44th edition of the Senior International Defense Management Course, held at NPS June 24 - July 19, gather for a group photo in Spruance Plaza on the university's campus. The course provides a combination of expert lectures, classroom discussion and immersive case studies to provide attendees with the strategic planning expertise required for the modern security environment.

Course participants draw upon expert opinion and their combined experiences to address the art and science of strategic level resource management and budget creation while addressing related concerns that may compete with limited resources and national priorities.

"The value of a course like this is that you give people a big picture view of how to manage defense resources and you give them the analytical tools to get the job done," said DRMI Military Lecturer, Lt. Cmdr. Zachary Tate.

SIDMC's "big picture" view is achieved through both classwork and lectures, but its most detailed learning exercise involves the immersion of class participants into ministerial positions for a hypothetical nation.

"Our students have to actually build a budget for a fictional country, 'DRMECIA' ... by taking this approach, they see the competing demands on the budget and have to come up with appropriate solutions," said DRMI Executive Director, Dr. Francois Melese.

Students take on the roles of DRMECIA's various ministers and are tasked with planning and building a national budget. As the students are guided through the process, a host of experts in varied disciplines speak with course participants about strategic issues, constraints and policies that must be managed at the ministerial level.

"If we're successful, the participants will think about their national security at a strategic level, and gain a new perspective and additional tools for managing their organization's resources to respond to contemporary security challenges," added DRMI Academic Associate Eva Regnier.

A theme that emerged in the four-week course was the need for increased international cooperation. Course participants discussed globalism and the increasingly interconnected nature of emerging challenges such as cyber threats and climate change. Students also acknowledged the accelerating rate of change that many of their nations are experiencing.

"Uncertainty and the rate of change are both increasing, which has driven changes in the strategic planning process and cycles in the U.S., and in some of our partner nations," said Regnier.

These perspectives are captured by course participants in case studies and structured discussions and used by instructors as they guide their students through the planning, resources management and budgeting process.

"We look at what threats and challenges we are facing and determine what sort of capabilities we need to address those challenges which leads to the planning," said Melese. "This leads to the planning phase where we look at the optimal mix of forces that we need to build and sustain within a given set of fiscal restraints."

"This leads to the creation of budgets presented to Parliaments or in our case Congress. We teach the underlying logic of building defense budgets, and the various tools and techniques that can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of defense forces," he continued. "We have faculty that specialize in these areas that help our partners build the mix of forces that is appropriate to individual states."

As course participants build their budgets they must attempt to predict the future consequences of their decisions. They perform cost analysis estimates and are challenged to determine indirect cost such as training, manpower and maintenance.

"Utilizing value focused thinking, we identify our goals and look at benefits of various investments and try to develop measures of effectiveness that meet our goals, we also have to look at the cost side, life cycle costs, operational costs, maintenance, etc.," added Melese.

In the context of the Durmacea exercise, participants must vie for scarce resources and work to create a budget that addresses competing priorities. But through the budgeting and planning process they learn about more than economics and budgetary constraints. They begin to learn about each other and to establish relationships that participants note will continue for years to come.

"I have built relationships with 33 leaders from all around the world, we are connecting the dots to see what we can do, not just today, but in the future," said Naval Supply Systems Command (NAVSUP)

Global Logistics Support Commander, Rear Adm. Jonathan A. Yuen. "What the course does is bring us together. We are going to disagree on things, but we will work together now and in the future."

"A human is a human. You are born here or there; you have your situation, we have ours; but, we are all just people," said Qatari Air Force Director of Logistics Mohammad al Kaabi. "Life is like mathematics, we all may solve problems in a different way, but we come to the same solution."

This sort of international cooperation is not merely a byproduct of the course; it is one of the course's principle goals.

"One of our most important goals is to facilitate the exchanges among the participants, who have an enormous amount to teach each other. Large and small-group discussions among the participants as well as activities outside of class, including those offered through the international studies program, are very important," said Regnier.

Assistant Minister for Plans, Policy and Operations Victoria K. Sawyer with the Liberian Ministry of Defense agrees that the course's real value comes from the relationships made at NPS and the exchange of information and ideas that DRMI facilitates.

"I share how we do things back home and they share their experiences as well. This sort of international cooperation helps to change minds and creates greater understanding," said Sawyer. "Unless you interact with others you will not know them well. We have interacted a great deal and it has given me a better idea about how to interact with people and to make better decision in my own organization."

Ultimately, it's the combination of coursework, interaction with peers, and the extensive case study with DRMECIA that provides participants with an invaluable educational experience.

"The DRMECIA exercise is mainly to help us to make decisions at a higher level within fixed constraints," said Sawyer. "Strategic planning, value for cost thinking, decision making, and most importantly, accountability and transparency ... This is what my country needs most.

"The course has really helped me and given me a desire to go home and work hard for my nation and to be patriotic," Sawyer continued. "I would like to see funds made available to bring civilian professors to our own country."

Posted August 1, 2013



Defense Resources Management Institute Director Dr. Francois Melese, second from right, walks with a few of the 35 participants from the latest Senior International Defense Management Course. The annual four-week course, completed July 19, provides senior leaders from several nations with an extensive educational experience in managing defense resources and decision-making processes.